

Public Safety Citizens Advisory Committee

28 Nov. 2007 Meeting Minutes

Present: Andy Kelemen, Mike Israel, Gayle Fisher-Stewart, Buddy Daniels, Capt. Ed. Coursey, Aaron Houston, Wolfgang Mergner, Charles Thomas, Fred Schultz

Absent: Enoch Bevel, Geneva Simmons

Review of October Minutes

Corrections to the last month's minutes, on pg. 2, correct that **Mike Israel** "...has taken issues to *previous* police chiefs and has been ignored." Par. 3, middle of the page: concerning neighborhood patrols.

A general discussion of neighborhood patrols then ensued. **Andy** indicated that **Chief Ricucci** was not happy with neighborhood patrols the issue being whether these patrols are effective and whether patrol volunteers are in danger in any way. **Andy** had a meeting with the chief recently who is now as anxious as **Wolfgang** is to get the neighborhood patrol people together for a meeting to discuss his, the Chief's, reservations and to seek information from the participants. **Buddy** indicated that he will assist **Wolfgang** in communications for the meeting.

Andy mentioned that he believes that people generally feel that the patrols are workable and useful. **Capt. Ed Coursey** contributed that there probably are no reliable studies concerning the effectiveness of patrols. **Ed** added that perhaps there could be a search to determine if patrols have caused problems. He is not aware of any formal studies about the effectiveness of citizen patrols. A "Google" search should be made to see if there have been incidents concerning danger for patrollers.

Wolfgang stated that he is also not sure concerning the effectiveness of patrols.

The discussion then turned to concerning the "fact" that patrols link the citizens to the police. Patrols observe things that are occurring in a neighborhood and if they are affiliated with the police department, reporting is facilitated. **Ed** indicated that patrols have witnessed offenses in the past. There is some anecdotal information concerning citizen patrols interacting with the police.

The **Chief** had asked **Wolfgang** to meet with him but this has not been set up as of yet. **Ed** stated that anytime when people set themselves apart from the general public, there is a potential for danger. However, if they patrol in twos, have radios, and walk down the middle of the street, there should be little danger. There is a need to find information from the past. **Wolfgang** contacted patrols in his neighborhood and 25 people indicated that they would attend a meeting with the **Chief**. The **Chief** and Mrs. **Plevy** have been trying to determine who has been and is involved in patrols. **Wolfgang** affirmed that he will be glad to work with **Ed** and the **Chief** on this issue. There is also indication that there is need for some training to allay concern that patrols might overstep its bounds. **Mike** will also see what he can find on the patrol issue.

On page 3 of the Minutes: "... that he could not believe the issue was "not" brought up." Add – **Charles** clarified that in his opinion the committee should tackle issues like this to advise the council.

Minutes were then approved with the stated corrections.

Short Reports

Andy attended the crime meeting in Ward 1, where 40 people showed up. The neighborhood patrols issue also came up at this meeting. A participant spoke up because people were saying how dangerous it was to walk at night etc. but because her son who is black, 6'4" and not fully functioning, she was always afraid that people will not give him the benefit of the doubt. It was very moving and disturbing.

Ed Coursey told PSCAC that the department provided training about how to deal with people with mental problems. The Ward 1 meeting went well. One of the issues that came up again as it does in practically every neighborhood meeting, that some residents were incensed that they were not told what was happening on their streets. And that a lot of people don't look at emails.

Aaron stated that **Chuck** had sent out something about informing people about what is going on in the neighborhood. People don't have the crime information for their areas. **Aaron** asked if there was a suggestion that PSCAC put up flyers and or hand them out, perhaps at the Metro Station to inform people of what is going on. **The question being, how to share pertinent information in a neighborhood?** **Andy** reminded the members that not everyone appreciates receiving information about crime. Safe Takoma is discussing having a kiosk at the METRO putting up WANTED posters among other notices. Businesspeople (OTBA) are flat out against putting up such information

Mike affirmed that it is misleading to do something like "publicizing crime". There is crime, but it is relatively low. **Wolfgang** asked what is it that you want to accomplish – that people become more cautious. Should we not frame the issue differently as prevention and safety education?

Charles stated that the idea he posted via email about flyers was misunderstood by a number of people; they wouldn't be "wanted" flyers. When he sees crime information, he gets scared and people change their activities. Rather, when someone is caught and convicted, and then information would this should be posted. If there are enough flyers about getting caught and convicted, then the criminals will become scared to operate in a particular area.

Mike responded that scaring criminals does not work. He said that he speaks from a generation of research and criminology. **Fred** stated that he was confused; that first we want to warn people about crime and then, secondly, are there people who hear about crime and thinks that there is a crime wave? Are we somehow then generating a phantom crime problem? It is important to re-assure people that there isn't a crime wave and that there are things being done about what crime there is. He's happy to

Aaron believes that people should be signed up for email alerts.

Charles had a question for **Mike** – is there research that the likelihood of getting caught is a deterrent? Mike answered that it is easier to deter white collar criminals than the street thugs.

Other topics discussed.

Discussion about whether we should send emails cc: to all members when addressing issues. There was also discussion when members send emails outside of the committee to the community and/or city officials and identifying themselves as PSCAC members.

Marijuana - Aaron met with the **Chief** concerning the issue of marijuana. They found points of agreement. While the **Chief** does not want his hands tied, he is not interested in pursuing small-time marijuana offenses. **Aaron** believes that this merits the committee's continued consideration.

Capt. Coursey: In the next two weeks, the crime analyst will be coming on board. She will provide us with a much better way of looking at historical and geographic crime data. Some of the software needed is available.

TPPD is currently undertaking a fairly large scale **anti-robbery detail**, approximately 4 officers on overtime along the DC line and Langley Park area. This year, there are fewer robberies than last year this time. Anecdotally, there are more guns involved. METRO is a prime area. Data does not show that there is a recent spike in robberies. Summer and late hours typically show more crime.

TPPD strength—there are two (2) openings one person went DC and one retired. Four officers are on long-term injury; 3 in academy and 1 is suspended.

Chief Ricucci has been committed to the enforcement unit. Patrol squads are thin, but making up with overtime. Another issue is burglaries during this holiday season; have had a number and are reinvigorating security surveys. People need to be looking for suspicious activity. It can occur right in front of people and not be seen.

Ed attended a large national capital region “Links” system: useful device for investigators that makes it easier to get background information on suspects. Most of it is funded through Homeland Security.

Mike asked whether people should resist muggers and robbers and **Ed** responded that they should not; resistance can result in injury and/or death.

Information about **false alarms**; there are 1,000 and 98% are false. Without enforcement, problem alarms will continue to cause problems. With rooftop burglaries, it is difficult to get up there to check to see if the alarm is false.

Ed reported on the presentation of the city auditor’s report pertaining to TPPD issues; most of the issues raised have been addressed. The TPPD has hired a part-time position to handle property and evidence. And they have been able separate administrative services out of directly handling the evidence. Property will be purged that does not need to be stored that is no longer evidence; owner unknown and should either be auctioned or disposed off.

The resolution for omitting the next meeting scheduled for December 26th passed.

The 2008 work plan is due January or February – can be done by email.

Quick look at the results of the 2007 Work-plan

On-going activities -- Looking at the list, things have moved ahead, so we are not too far off.

- AED’s were purchased in June and they have not been delivered.
- Chief has gotten interested in the Safety Contacts; Buddy has given the chief the “book,” but it is outdated. Buddy and the chief met and Mrs. Plevy has been sending out alerts and seems to think that doing so is a good thing. He plans to meet with Mrs. Plevy re: what was done in the past.

- We do have two new people.
- Need to do more about safety contacts.

Potential disposition of “New Activities” that were planed for 2007

- Table the safety contacts until January and prepare a “program” document to be presented.
- The “CERT-lite” program is stalled right now and Andy will be involved.
- Split second bullet from bottom of page 6 into crime avoidance and personal protection.
- **Charles** is suggesting a new idea, perhaps research on the issue of crime.
- **Mike** stated that there is really not a crime problem in TP; crime is a part of the American fabric.
 - We should not intervene into the prosecution; we have to part in it.
 - **Andy** indicated that we can support the victims to give testimony and to stand with them. Can we strengthen prosecution by standing with victims and witnesses?
 - **Charles** suggested that we list in general terms what we think we should look at.
 - **Mike** – these are public policy not PSCAC issues: deployment of police; where money is spent. Incarceration rate has been shown nothing to do with lowering the crime rate. Crime is affected by aging out. We do more harm than good by getting involved here.
 - **Charles** suggested that we look at the data.
 - **Charles** should write down what he wants (and others, too) and send it around to committee members.
- **Aaron** would re-write the issue concerning marijuana and send it around.

Everyone should firm-up what they propose for activities/agendas for the committee and circulate to the all the committee members.

Action Items

Neighborhood patrols

- **Buddy** will assist **Wolfgang** in getting people together for the patrol members meeting meeting.
- “Google” search to be conducted by **Wolfgang** and **Mike**: a) to find if there have been incidents concerning patrol members victimization or placed in danger; and **Mike** will also see what he can find on the patrol effectiveness issue.

Communicating crime information

- **Aaron** and **Chuck** – propose, in writing, effective ways to communicate crime issues to residents.

Marijuana

- **Aaron** -- re-write the issue concerning marijuana and send it around in PSCAC for comments.

Circulating suggestions before meetings

- **Charles** should write down what he wants (and others, too) and send it around to committee members.

Meeting Adjourned